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On-The-Record Interview of Senator Mansfield The Detroit News

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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Following is an ON-THE-RECORD interview with Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield by the Detroit News, the Newark News, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, and the Washington Star:

Question: There has been a lot said on the Senate floor and in the newspapers about the quality of leadership in the Senate. Since leadership is frequently measured by what is or is not accomplished, can you tell us how you view the record of the Senate under your leadership?

Senator Mansfield: As far as the analysis of the leadership or a leader is concerned, that is up to each individual to decide as to whether it is good, bad, or indifferent. But I think the final test is what the Senate has done.

I would say that the Senate, up to this time, has made a very respectable record, and for this the Senate should get credit. As far as the Congress is concerned, we have completed action on 43 pieces of legislation out of 128, including appropriations, asked for by the President this year. In addition to that, 24 other measures, which have been recommended by the President, have passed the Senate. Out of a total of 128 Presidential recommendations this year, that would give us an average of 58 per cent up to this moment.

All those bills, of course, are not major, but I would point out that in all the Presidential recommendations, as I see the picture now, there remain only three bills which could be considered of really major significance--~~these~~ the Tax bill, the Civil Rights bill, and the Health Care for the Aged bill.

Q.: Senator (Everett M.) Dirksen has estimated it would be March 15 before the Finance Committee gets the Tax bill out on the floor. Does it look that far away to you?

Senator Mansfield: Maybe Senator Dirksen is being a little too pessimistic. It is my understanding that the committee hearings will conclude on the Tax bill on Dec. 13. I would hope that if we do not get a Civil Rights bill in between we would be ready to take up the Tax bill shortly after New Year's.

Q.: Do you think from now on Congress, because of the growth of the country and so on, is going to be in session all year, or do you think something might be done to shorten the sessions in the future?

Senator Mansfield: I would hope that they could shorten sessions or prepare themselves to operate on a year-round basis. If they are going to shorten the sessions, they are going to have to bring about some reforms in the rules of the Senate pertaining to germaneness. They will have to do something about the fact that the Finance Committee in the Senate cannot take up a measure such as the Tax bill, for example, until the House ^(ways + means) Finance Committee is through with it and it has passed that body. I believe the time taken on that bill was approximately nine months this year. That applies to other bills out of the House Ways and Means Committee, too, such as Medicare.

Q.: The custom applies to appropriations also, does it not?

Senator Mansfield: That is correct. Some people say that the House has a constitutional right. I think that is a debatable question. But I would think that a formula based on what Senator (Richard B.) Russell proposed some months ago, to the effect that

consideration be given to half the bills originating in each house, is worthy of consideration, or at least that we could start hearings at the same time the other body does.

The Senate is blamed all too often for delays when, as a matter of fact, we are unable to act in our committees until the opposite committees in the House have acted on the legislation under consideration.

Q.: You would think that most of the members of the Senate would share your pride in what has been accomplished. To what do you attribute the criticisms of other members of the Senate that we had last week.

Senator Mansfield: I think the members are getting a little restless, a little edgy. It has been a long session. It hasn't been a dramatic or glamorous session. There are other responsibilities which impinge upon the activities of the members of this body. But I would say that, by and large, there are very few members who would be willing to stand up and state that they are dissatisfied with the progress of the Senate.

I have heard a lot about these cloakroom rumors. I am afraid that most of these cloakroom rumors come out of the imaginations and the speculations of members of the press. I have yet to see one of these cloakroom ~~commandos~~ commandos that they talk about. If there are any, I wish they would come to me and make their views known, and, as far as I am concerned, I would get up on the Senate floor and do the same thing.

Q.: It is frequently said that you believe in dealing with other Senators as one adult to another, but that they really

would like to have their arms twisted now and then.

Senator Mansfield: I would disagree completely. I think this is a body of mature men and women. They want to be treated as equals. They are. I expect to be treated by them as I treat them, and I am.

They have been most co-operative. There has been no dilatoriness that I am aware of. Despite reports to the contrary, I have seen no evidence of any delaying action on the part of the Southerners. Nor have I seen any evidence of delay on the part of Senator ~~Byrd~~ (Harry F.) Byrd, whose committee is considering the Tax bill at the moment.

He has stated that he thought that they could finish their consideration of the bill in the vicinity of six weeks. That has been extended, but I would be the last one in the world to question Harry Byrd's good faith as some have.

Q.: That six or eight weeks would be measured against eight or nine months in the House, wouldn't it?

Senator Mansfield: That is correct. A lot of people do not take that comparison into consideration.

Q.: Do you think the Magnuson plan of having two sessions a year would help in the future?

Senator Mansfield: I certainly do. I have advocated it for a long time, because what Senator Magnuson's proposal would do would be to have a legislative session and an appropriation session. At the present time, we sandwich the appropriation bills, some of them up in the tens of billions of dollars, between other legislative proposals. We do not give them the attention they deserve.

I think we also ought to reduce the number necessary to

invoke cloture from two-thirds of those present and voting to three-fifths. I think we ought to follow Senator (John O.) Pastore's idea of a rule of germaneness for the first four or five hours each day. And I think we ought to do something about the authority which each individual Senator has to object to unanimous consent requests.

The times call for a change. Changes must be made without ^{under} ~~deter~~mining the foundations of the Senate as an institution. But with the questions coming before us in this day and age, I think that changes are mandatory, though I would not go as far as some of our members would recommend.

Q.: How do you feel about the question of pressure or lack of it or co-ordination between the Senate and the White House?

Senator Mansfield: ~~xxxx~~ As far as I am concerned personally, I have nothing but words of praise for the relationship which exists between the White House and this body.

Q.: One complaint¹¹ we hear sometimes is that the scheduling of votes is so uncertain that Senators can't tell when it is safe to be out of town. Do you consider it the responsibility of the leadership to try to group these votes and make the schedule known in advance?

Senator Mansfield: Insofar as possible. I must say I have been at fault many times in that respect. But when you have ~~pepex~~ colleagues come to you two or three times a week and say, "Please don't bring up this bill on that day," "Please don't vote at this hour," "I have an engagement out home and I can't be here," it places the leadership in a very difficult position, because the leadership cannot tell a member to stay on the floor. He can ask the members to stay on the floor, but they can thumb their noses at him, and they do it quite often.

The leadership has no real power, none at all. He has to operate on the basis of persuasion, accommodation, understanding, but he has to expect something like that in return. But all too often members come to me, and on occasion some have even threatened me, saying that they had engagements back home or they wanted to go some place for some reason, and, very rarely, if I did ^{not accomodate them,} well, they would see that there was a lot of talk and ^{no} action would be taken ^{on the floor} and so forth and so on.

Q.: Is there too much absenteeism in the Senate?

Senator Mansfield: There is.

Q.: It seems inevitable that there is going to be a filibuster of some kind on the Civil Rights bill. There has been some criticism of you on the grounds you haven't held people's feet ~~to~~ to the fire, so to speak, and kept them up all night.

Senator Mansfield: I don't intend to. This is not a circus or a sideshow. We are not operating in a pit, with spectators coming into the galleries late at night to see Senators of the Republic come out in bedroom slippers, without ~~necks~~ neckties, with hair uncombed and pajama tops sticking out of their necks.

I believe there is a certain amount of dignity and decorum ~~attached~~ attached to this institution and to the position that each of us holds. Regardless of the consequences, as far as I am concerned, that dignity will be upheld and the best interests of this institution will be looked after as long as I happen to be the leader.

Q.: **M** You would rather see the rules modernized than go to an endurance contest?

Senator Mansfield: Of course. Who wins in an endurance contest? Not the older members, not those who may be under medical treatment. But the minority wins, because they are well disciplined, they know what they are doing. ^{Some of those} ~~The great majority~~, who are always spouting off and talking about how much they are for civil rights-- where are they when you want a quorum call? They are not around.

So as far as being a whip-cracker or a co-ordinator for a Roman holiday, count me out.

Q.: Do ~~km~~ you think Congress should undertake to establish a code of ethics for its members?

Senator Mansfield: That is a question which I do not feel I am qualified to answer for the Senate. As far as I personally am concerned, yes. I think it proper to list outside stockholdings and other business interests, as has been done by Senators (Joseph S.) Clark of Pennsylvania, (Stephen M.) Young of Ohio, (Hugh) Scott of Pennsylvania, and perhaps others. I listed mine several years ago. It was very easy. I had none.

I think that the Senate is a very honest body. I think the individual members of the Senate are honest representatives of the people. I would not want suspicion to be cast upon them, because after having observed them for several decades now I have nothing but the highest admiration for the membership of this body.

Q.: But the Congress seems to point this suspicion towards people who are selected for executive jobs in the Administration.

Senator Mansfield: That is correct. I have felt for a long time that the Congress has carried this idea of conflict of interest entirely too far as regards Presidential appointees. I think it is

very unfair. I think if a man is brought into Government he should be considered honest until proven otherwise. He should be looked into thoroughly before being appointed, as I am sure they are. I do not think they should have to get rid of their stocks, nor do I think they should be subjected to an inquisition.

Q.: Do you think that the Senate's decision to investigate the outside activities of its staff employes should be limited to those employes or should the investigation proceed to wherever the evidence leads it?

Senator Mansfield: It should be limited to employes of the Senate as a whole. As far as the employes in a Senator's office are concerned, that is that particular Senator's direct responsibility. As far as the Senators themselves are concerned, that is something which they themselves must face up to.

There have been bills in the Rules Committee for well over a decade seeking to bring about this disclosure on the part of Senators. These bills are lying fallow in the Rules Committee. I would hope that the Rules Committee in good time would take them up and report them out and bring them to the Senate floor for consideration and debate.

Q.: Isn't there some weight to the argument of a Senate employe who might say, "Well, what is wrong if I have outside business interests because my bosses do?"

Senator Mansfield: There is an argument there and a good one. I must say that as far as the outside interests of Senate employes are concerned, the fault primarily lies with the Senate itself, because we have laid down no rules, regulations or guidelines.

Q.: Do you think that the Senate will now issue such guidelines?

Senator Mansfield: I think that they will. As ~~x~~ far as Senate employes who are directly or indirectly subject to the control of the Democratic majority, that is being done at the present time.

Q.: Do you think the disclosures about Robert G. Baker, the ~~x~~ former Majority Secretary, have hurt the reputation of the Senate in the country?

Senator Mansfield: As far as Bobby Baker's work in the Senate was concerned, it was excellent and efficient. He did his job well. As for the ^{rest of the} question, yes.

Q.: Do you ever find it frustrating to be leader of a group of 66 other men who range from Senator (Harrison) Williams of New Jersey to Senator (Frank) Lausche of Ohio?

Senator Mansfield: I find it frustrating, exhilarating and depressing.

Q. You come from Montana, and the West supposedly is beginning to look like Goldwater territory to a lot of Republicans and perhaps to many Democrats. How do you feel about your own chances for re-election next year and the chances of the Democratic Party doing a better job of picking up Western States they missed in 1960?

Senator Mansfield: First, I wouldn't give the Rocky Mountain West to Goldwater. I think it is just as much Kennedy country as it is Goldwater territory.

Secondly, as far as my own future is concerned, it is a little early for me to say anything. Montana is a two-party state. No one is invincible in this profession. No matter who runs for the Senate next year, he is going to have an extremely difficult ~~x~~ job. Campaigns in Montana are tough, but I have been a pretty lucky man. I have been back here for 21 years, which is a long time. I have had

the breaks. I have had the benefit of the doubt in the minds of lots of my people.

When ~~I~~ we go into next year's campaign, I will either win or I will lose, and whichever way it comes out I will have no apologies and no regrets.

Q.: You will have no regrets ~~or~~ and no inhibitions about campaigning on the Kennedy ticket?

Senator Mansfield: None in the least. I am delighted to campaign on the Kennedy ticket and ^{in behalf} ~~in behalf~~ of President Kennedy, and all the way.

END